

## Press Release – 30 July 2007

At the invitation of Conciliation Resources the twentieth dialogue workshop in an ongoing series on the Georgian–Abkhaz conflict and peace process took place in London 27–30 July 2007. The meeting brought together Members of Parliament and public figures from both sides of the conflict. The series provides a forum for participants to exchange information and to analyse opportunities and obstacles in the peace process in an atmosphere that encourages realism and mutual respect.

The participants examined developments that currently do or potentially could influence the peace process. Some of these derived from the context in the region such as events in relation to the Kodori Gorge over the past year, the fragile situation in the Gali region, difficulties in the formal negotiation process and the limited opportunities for informal engagement between the parties. They also discussed the relevance for future Georgian/Abkhaz relations of developments elsewhere, such as the prospects for recognition of Kosovo, prospects for Georgian accession to NATO, as well as the award of the 2014 Olympics to Sochi. Examining the strategies that the parties pursue to achieve their objectives it was observed that the desire to achieve short-term gains often obstructs the establishment of a cooperative framework for long-term resolution of the conflict. The need to respect the concerns of the other side was noted as being important whether or not agreeing with them. An absence of respect does not encourage an approach to negotiations that can break out of the cycle of pursuing short-term gains at the expense of conflict transformation. Another important question analysed in the workshop is the manner in which creative ideas can improve awareness of political options concerning the issues that separate the parties and how these ideas can be communicated to political leaders and society more generally.

The discussions in the workshop were frank, open and respectful. Participants commented on the need for more opportunities for information exchange and increasing understanding in order to avoid further polarisation. They welcomed the opportunity to meet in an informal and unofficial context that does not have a decision-making character.

The Abkhaz participants in the workshop were Daur Arshba, Beslan Dzhopua, Manana Gurgulia, Garri Samanba, Viacheslav Tsugba and Nadia Venediktova. The Georgian participants were Irakli Iashvili, Vakhtang Khmaladze, Vakhtang Kolbaia, Ia Tikanadze, Guram Vakhtangishvili and Paata Zakareishvili. Everyone took part in an individual capacity.

The workshop was organised by Conciliation Resources (London), an international non-governmental organisation that has worked in the Caucasus for the past decade. Jonathan Cohen and Clem McCartney facilitated the meeting.

The Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the United Kingdom Global Conflict Prevention Pool funded the workshop.